

No 12 8

THE

# True Protestant :

A

## DISSERTATION

SHEWING

The Necessity of asserting the Principles of  
LIBERTY in their *full Extent.* 12

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By ROBERT SEAGRAVE, A. M.

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*The Ax is laid to the Root of the Tree.*

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*Siquid novisti rectius istis  
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum.*

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L O N D O N :

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THE  
TRUE PROTESTANT.



General Regard to the Rights of Mankind, and particularly those of the Protestant Interest, has induc'd me to attempt a

Dissertation, in order to *defend, explain,* and *illustrate* so valuable an Article.

LIBERTY is an Article of the greatest Consequence. So fine a Flower in the Garden of human Society, requires to have the strictest Watch kept about it; and if the Weeds have any Way invaded it, it merits to be disentangled

from them, and to be set in the most open Light.

If LIBERTY is the Right of all Men, what should discourage its being understood by all? What should hinder its being cultivated by all, and asserted in its *full Extent*? This will ever prove the best Defence against Popery. To prevent the Return of Popery into a Protestant Nation, it is not sufficient to rely on the Influence of private Interest, or Property, because the Bulk of a Nation has but little Property. In our late Season of public Danger, it was not the Landed-Interest, or Stock-Interest, or any that may be called a partial Interest, but the Spirit of Liberty and Affection, which, under Providence, principally carried the Point. With the same View is offered this present Essay.

Every wise Man esteems *Liberty* his best Possession; he values it as his Birthright; and does not forget that



'tis also the Birthright of others. He knows it, because he feels it the chief Ingredient of his Happiness. It is a Circumstance in Society, just as necessary and useful in the moral World, as Air in the elemental, to give Life, Motion and Vigour to the Whole. The Hindrances and Preventions of Liberty in the World are *Fear*, *Indolence* and *Superstition*, its Enemies *Ambition* and *Self*. In the mean Time, it is doubtful who are most to be blam'd, the Ambitious, or the Indolent.

In Proportion as Mankind possess this Circumstance, this Air pure and free, or dense and obstructed, their Communities are more or less agreeable. Some Communities, 'tis true, make a shift with a small Share of it; but it is either because they know no better, or have not a Capacity of procuring more. There is one Article in the World, I mean *Religion*, which cannot subsist without Liberty, not only tolerably, but in no Sense at all. Somewhat often  
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passes for Religion with several, the Effect of Authority and Custom ; yet is term'd such improperly, nothing being properly Religion, except what a Man knows for himself, believes for himself, and his Eyes behold, and not another. *Belief, Knowledge, Judgment,* are Things not transferable ; they must be all acquir'd, they must be distinctly received, though possibly through Assistance of others, before I can call them *my Belief, my Knowledge, my Judgment.* For Instance : A Number of Persons are taking the Survey of some eminent City, at a Distance from the Suburbs ; as a Countryman or Stranger I join myself to them : How agreeably, say they, one sees the great City from this Spot : Behold, Countryman, how conspicuous the Tower ; see there the Shipping ; a majestic Dome rises in the Midst of the *Metropolis*, its Summit in the Clouds ; what a Variety of attendant Spires, with each its particular Denomination ; a Range of innumerable Buildings carries you far to the West ;

the Whole terminated with an illustrious Abbey ! Now this may be a real Prospect, and the several Objects sufficiently known to Persons conversant in the Place ; but my Friends must excuse me, if, considered as a Stranger, I cannot take them in so readily as they can run them over : Time to distinguish is requisite for me : The Objects must be plain to me, as well as to my Guides, before I can assert them ; because I do not find that I can see with another's Eye. He that does not see for himself, does not see at all.

Again, I may happen to fall amongst Persons who only *pretend* to Sights ; who have seen nothing themselves, nor have any Thing to shew, but would make a Property of me for their Maintenance. In such possible Circumstances, what doth it concern me to do ? Surely to use the greatest Caution against being imposed upon, or to shun and abandon an Imposition as soon as I discern it ; least I give away my Time and  
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Money for nothing, or for that which is worse than nothing ; after the Manner of the *Dutch* Peasants, who, as *Erasmus* relates it, were made to believe at Noon-day, by the Ingenuity of two or three Juglers, that they saw in the Sky a *red Dragon* ; whilst the Monster had no Existence, except in the Artist's Assurance, and their deluded Imagination. Let the Reader take Care not to be found in the Number of them, who, in the Noon-day of Learning and Knowledge, continue to see a Dragon.

It is observable, Mankind may trust the making of Laws, and in some Respect their Civil Liberties, though not their Senses, in the Hands of others. Nor can it be avoided, because Society, as such, hath great Reference to outward and temporal Articles. We may commit our Property, or Goods, to the Discretion and Disposal of a Representative ; but we are incapable of having a Trustee in the Article of Religion. Some Persons seem to think it



as lawful to make *Creeeds* for others, as *Acts of Parliament*; and perhaps would form as many, might they be permitted. Surely these Zealots have not well weighed the Attempt, but have been drawn forward by Precedents, and by a little secret Pride in Nature. A considerate Person would not take upon him another's Conscience, if he might; and a Man honest to himself cannot give it up. He that thinks of submitting his Understanding to another, deceives both himself, and the Person he would compliment; he cannot though he would. Many, indeed, flatter themselves, that through the Authority of a Church, or by the superior Wisdom and Guidance of the Learned, they have believed much, who, perhaps, upon a strict Inquiry, would not be found to have believed any Thing. To believe with the Church is frequently no Belief at all. In this Case the Understanding hath taken no Pains. Persons have no *Ideas*;  
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they have repeated Words after others, with *little or no Meaning* in them.

Again, If the Understanding cannot be enlighten'd by mere Authority, nor a single Conscience be (in Propriety of Speech) prescribed to, how vain must be the Attempt to prescribe, in Points of Religion, to a whole Nation at once ! how unjust to subject to Pains and Penalties, and even cast out of the Christian Pale, all who dissent from an established Opinion ! Men, who insist upon an *Establishment*, and bind it by *coercive Means*, are troubled with a short Memory. They protested formerly against human Power, in the Person of the Pope, and now are pleading for it. Disputing with the *Romanists*, they stand up for the Scriptures, and Right of private Judgment ; but to their Fellow-Protestants, are continually crying up the high and sacred Office of the Clergy, meaning always their own Clergy ; the Illiteracy of the common People, and utter Incapacity

to understand the Scriptures, Church-Order, Peace of the State, Regularity, and various Arguments, which, in the Hands of the *Romanists*, they esteem'd of no Weight: So that they undermine the Rights they us'd to assert, and talk of Liberty, but mean it only for themselves and their own Party. We have Protestants, it is to be fear'd, too confin'd and narrow of most Denominations; such will embrace you, if you agree with them in every Point; but the least Variation staggers all their Friendship; presently they are disgusted with you, you are an *Heathen Man*, and a *Publican*.

An Evil of this Kind sometimes attends Conversation, on Subjects not religious. Most Men are apter to give, than to suffer, Contradiction. *Fervidio*, though a Person of many good Qualities, being engaged in a Debate, is displeased if you differ from his Sentiments: He does not consider, that if you oppose his Sentiments, he opposes



yours. *Fervidio's* Passions rise to such a Degree, that it becomes inconvenient to sit near him. And whence arises all this Resentment and Discontent? Only because his Friend, or the Company, do not agree to set him up for a Pope. Thorough Politeness considers what is due to others, as well as what is claim'd to one's self; whilst the Man, who is *not* a Protestant, cannot have *true Manners*. But to return from this Digression, if it be a Digression.

It is observable, before the Reformation our Doctors, and Advocates against *Rome*, bottom'd themselves upon Liberty; they pleaded for private Judgment, and sole Authority of Scripture; that is to say, that every Man as well common Man as Ecclesiastic, hath a Right to read and understand the Scripture for himself; I say, for himself, otherwise the Concession hath no Meaning in it, but is an errant Mockery. But it seems, when the pretended Successor of Saint *Peter* was thrown out of

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the Saddle, others were standing ready to get in. Possibly they were persuaded better Things of themselves. Though the *Italian* had acted erroneously, and wickedly, yet would not they. That is, the *Pope* with his Infallibility ought not to be trusted; yet fallible Men (especially in *Great Britain*) might. So *Rome* and *Constantinople* contended antiently about the Title of Universal and OEcumenical Bishop, which in Truth belonged to neither. *Rome* protested against *Constantinople*, when the *Grecian* Patriarch solicited the Supremacy, and declared, that whosoever should accept that Title, would be the Forerunner of *Antichrist*; yet by-and-by she accepted it herself. When Power fairly presents itself, and licks the Hand of human Nature, it is no easy Matter to refuse it. This calls for the greater Care and Watchfulness in the Guardians of Liberty, to keep the Enemy at Arms-length. He that gives Way to the least Power, properly so call'd in Matters of Religion, in Effect

fect gives Way to it all. There is no being an Half-Protestant. No Evil is changed by a Change of Hands: Where the Evil itself is human Authority, it waits *an absolute Removal*. An *Establishment* in Religion, *other* than the Scriptures, besides that it hath no Warrant, never answered a good Purpose, but is sure to have bad Effects. Under Colour of attempting Uniformity in Opinions, which Men can no sooner produce than they can an Uniformity of Faces, they generally mean the Exaltation of Self; that is, that their own Opinion, not properly because in Scripture, but because their own, shall have the Pre-eminence. Possibly they mean well, (for I would allow to the utmost) but insensibly they thrust themselves into the Place of the Deity, and their Establishment ever did, and ever will, take the Place of the Scriptures. Every Man and every Party profess indeed to found their Scheme on the Scriptures; but whether it be there or no, it is no sooner established but it becomes as effectual

fectual as the Scripture, and as much regarded by the timorous Bulk of Mankind. On this Occasion, it makes a mere Complement to the Scriptures. It professes to rest and depend upon them, but yet steals their Influence, and cloaths itself with their Authority. 'Tis so ready at hand, Men trouble themselves to go no farther. Hence springs amongst them, and increases, Formality, Ignorance, Irreligion, and a Readiness to return to Popery, by the first Temptation that may rise in their way. Religion of Man's making is always shallow, and very uncertain.

It is remarkable, that no foreign Protestant Churches sat down at the Reformation in the manner of the Church of *England*. Neither do we read of a national Church at all in the New Testament. We read of Churches in the plural Number, the Churches of *Judea*, the Churches of *Galatia*, the seven Churches in *Asia*, or the Church of

of some particular City ; but nothing occurs under the Stile of national or provincial. This gives us a proper Idea of the Christian Community throughout the World. Every *Congregation* is a Church *independent* of others, and the Whole taken collectively makes the Church, so far as it is visible. Again, according to Christian Liberty, every *Member* in a Congregation is *independent* of another in that Congregation ; the meanest Man or Woman as free as the greatest. Not that such Liberty authorizes a Member to disagree with Minister or People, through a Spirit of Levity and Wantonness ; this would be criminal. Rather a Man of Conscience and Virtue would agree in every Point, if possible, for Peace and Order's sake. Nevertheless, a Freedom must be asserted and maintained, if Persons would be *consistent* Protestants and *rational* Christians.

Let us observe what our Bibles hold forth on Subjects of this kind. The  
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Author of Christianity has thought fit to exprefs and declare himfelf in thefe Terms. *My Kingdom is not of this World.* That is, the Church of *Jeſus* hath no Reference to worldly Advantages, nor ſtands in worldly Supports. It is a Kingdom in the Conſcience, where none hath a Right to be, nor can be King, but *Chriſt* himſelf. Its Weapons or Supports are not carnal, but *ſpiritual*. It depends not upon coercive Power, like civil Government; nor upon Pomp and Grandeur; nor yet upon Emoluments and Profits to its Followers. Rather it ſtands in the reverſe of theſe. Self-denial is written upon the Threshold, but many ſeem to have overlooked it, at their coming in. Again, *The Kings of the Gentiles exerciſe Lordſhip over them, and they that exerciſe Authority upon them are called Benefactors.* But ye ſhall not be ſo; but he that is greateſt among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief as he that doth ſerve. Persons of common Under-  
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standing think nothing can be plainer than this Passage against prelatie Power and Title. Yet *Ecclesiastics*, having the Benefit of an uncommon Genius, shun the Force of the Text, and evade all its Prohibition, by a Leaf out of the Pope's Book; who, with all his magnificent Titles, stiles himself also the Servant of Servants, but in the latter Part he is without any Meaning. The Sons of *Zebedee* indeed understood our Saviour very erroneously, and discovered a contrary Mind and Disposition, when they desired to sit one on his right Hand, and the other on his left, in his Kingdom. Some Apology may be made for them. At that Time they were Persons of small Experience; they were *young* Disciples. But it is not so easy to apologize for Persons advanced in Years, and *Fathers* in Christianity, that they should be of the same Mind.

The Apostle *Paul*, I apprehend, knew perfectly well the Nature and Principles

Principles of the Christian Religion. Paul asserts not only his own Freedom from all Men, but acknowledges and avows, relatively both to himself and every other Minister, precisely thus, *Not that we have Dominion over your Faith, but are Helpers of your Joy.* This, no doubt, is the proper Character of a virtuous and modest Minister. He that assumes more, has no Warrant for it from the Scriptures, whatsoever Warrant he may have made out for himself, or others may have been weak enough to give him. The Text foregoing appears so determinate and particular, that I have sometimes wondered the Advocates for human Establishments have not endeavoured to find out by Criticism, that surely there must be a Mistake in it. *Not that we have Dominion!* Methinks it cannot be a right Reading. Hath not the Particle *not* been an Interpolation, and slipped into the Original, through the Inadvertency of the Transcriber? These Transcribers are heedless Men.

Or was not the Transcriber some secret and wicked *Heretic*, who has done this thing from Malice propense against the whole Hierarchical System?

No doubt Helps in the Church may and ought to be admitted; and, as other Texts intimate, we are to *obey them who have the Rule over us*; that is, so far as they obey the Word of God. No Man can rationally interpret such a Passage to any farther Latitude. And, the Elder or Minister, who *labours* in Word and Doctrine, is worthy of *double Honour*; is worthy to be respected and esteemed proportionably to the Labour he takes in his Office. Others who creep in with a View to Maintenance and Promotion, who are *Artists*, and shew Sights in the Air, are justly void of any such Title.

There are Ministers in the World some of God's, and some of Man's making only. A Protestant should

learn



learn to distinguish them, and know them one from another. Till he does this, he suffers many Inconveniences. The Minister who is of Man's making only is a *Priest*, be he of the *established* Party, or of any *other*. There are Priests of all Parties. Whatsoever Variety attends their respective Habits and Appearance, the Humour and Genius of them is one and the same. 'Tis equally a Truth, wherever a *virtuous* and *modest* Minister is met with, he is worthy of Respect, be his Party what it may.

So far we are come delineating the Character of a *true* Protestant; his Right of private Judgment; Use of it; his Temper; and, if I may so express it, Management of himself, with respect to Parties.

Let us now enquire whether *Time* and *Experience* does not confirm the Justness of such a Character.

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Let a moderate Survey be taken of Facts. What End have religious Establishments, whether of Men or Things, answered? What have they produced? An *Uniformity* indeed, but with the lower Classes of Mankind, generally an Uniformity of Ignorance. As to the upper Classes, Persons of Education and Power are never much controuled by the Establishment, and the Clergy themselves are not backward to evade it, in many Respects, for themselves, howsoever they would bind it upon others. 'Tis well known by those who have made Observation and Enquiry, that very much Alteration hath arisen in the Church of *England*, since its first Sanction, both in Discipline and Doctrine, especially in the latter.

If the present Generation think that they are standing upon the established Doctrines, they are greatly mistaken. Since the Time of Archbishop *Laud*, whose Influence was unhappily so great

in the Reign of *Charles* the First, the Clergy have introduced into the Pulpit a new Scheme of Preaching; a (mere) moral Scheme, contrary to the Sense of the Church-Articles, or the Tenets of foreign Protestants, and our own Reformers. Not that I oppose the Clergy's Right of changing their Opinion, (if they have any) nor would abridge them more than others; yet cannot help thinking, that they make full light of a solemn Subscription, and are not wont to be so unsteady in other Points. There are Maxims and Articles of a temporal Nature, where they are steady enough. Here they are of one Mind, and of one Judgment.

I must acknowledge my own Opinion is for the *old Divinity*; because modern Preaching does not appear to me substantial enough to influence the Minds of Mankind. They have not in fact been reformed by it. Vice is too mighty for it. Possibly to our new Divinity may be owing, in some measure,

measure, that Dissolution of Manners, and formidable Absence of Integrity, which hath been creeping upon the Nation several Years, threatening Ruin to the State. But I refer this to the Reader, and (with Deference) be our Statesmen too, to judge as they conceive convenient.

Let us go on to the Case of the *Canons*, another Part of our Ecclesiastical Establishment. What does Time and Experience shew us about these? Are they used to any good purpose, or ever likely so to be used? They have followed obsolete Statutes; or are like a Rod, which some Nurse hides over the Chimney, till it is covered with Dust. A Rod she never brings out against a favourite Child; it is produced, if at all, against a sort of Outcasts. The *Canons* are supposed to be Rules of Government and Discipline, but it is only supposed. Whom do they conclude, except the powerless and imprudent! Perhaps it will be replied



the Age of the World is unfavourable to Church-Power: The Hands of the Clergy are tied up. Possibly so, in some measure; because their Hands were apt to be loose against wrong Persons. Yet Times and Seasons cannot, I should think, hinder the Clergy from being regular and orderly themselves. They might conform to Rule in their own Conduct. Could they do no more, they might set a good Example. It is Matter of Stumbling to the Laity, when they hear and discern amongst them so much *Non-Residence*, *Pluralities* and *Dispensations*. Are they necessitated to these Things? Does the Infidelity or Unfavourableness of the Times they complain of keep a Prelate from his Diocese, or a Minister from residing with his Flock? These Complaints should induce them, one would think, to be more strictly resident, to prevent Infection; more watchful and laborious than ordinary, if the Benefit of the Sheep be their principal Object. Is there such a Deficiency in the num-

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ber of Ministers now-a-days, that many are obliged to be Pluralists? Are they the worthiest of the Order always, who possess *three* or *four* Preferments; or they the unworthiest, who go without any, and perhaps have Families that suffer great Inconveniences through Straitness of Circumstance! Facts are stubborn Things; if the Brethren oppress one another, what will not the Laity infer? No Precept can speak so loud as Example. It is in vain to cry out against *Infidelity* and *Deism*; it requires no great Sagacity to discern from what Quarter Infidelity takes *Encouragement*, if not its Beginning.

The Affair of Dispensations witnesses that Ecclesiastical Persons do not chuse to be confined and abridged, when a Connivance and Indulgence can be had. Not many deny themselves, or are restrained, by Conscience of the Establishment. I know but one *Canon* secure from all Infringement, and that is the 72d, latter Part, which pro-  
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hibits their *casting out any Devil, or Devils, without Licence of the Ordinary*. I apprehend the Matter here to be pretty safe, perhaps equally without a Licence, and with one.

Dispensations evidently shew, that the Clergy do not esteem the Establishment sacred in its own Nature. If it be fit to excuse a Son, or a Nephew, or a Favourite from strict Observances, I should be apt to argue, it would be as fit to excuse others. And farther, if the Clergy in general feel little Coercion by the *Canons*, I should be apt to argue, it was an unnatural Coercion from the Beginning, such as no Man could, in every respect, abide by; such which the Laity have the same Justice to be exempted from, if there be any, with the Clergy themselves. Why must the Laity be put under Saws and Harrows, and left to sustain Burdens, which others will not touch with one of their Fingers? Why must the Laity stand all the Fire of Church Artillery by

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themselves? The Equity of Things does not justify such a Measure.

The *Jurisdiction* of the *Commons*, whom does it punish or affect? Not the Clergy, nor yet Persons of Rank and Figure amongst the Laity. When this Spider's Web catches a weak Sinner, he is held, he is entangled, and not extricated whilst a Drop of Blood remains in his Body. The helpless Fly loses its Life in the Web, whilst the Bird of Force brushes it away with his Wings. No doubt such Inequalities ought not to be. The Jurisdiction either over-acts itself, or under-acts itself. Or rather, the Foundation of it is scarcely warrantable. It is a Species of Law that might be spared. The Weapons of the Church ought in no Case to be other than spiritual. Whatsoever is more than this, I mean *pecuniary* and *corporal*, whether executed or not executed, is erroneous, and hath no Foundation either in Scripture or Reason. It is a Relic of that ambitious



tious Church, or rather Court, of *Rome*, where the *Pope*, who sitteth upon seven Hills, has two Swords carried before him, a spiritual and a temporal one also; by a gross and mean Construction of that Passage in Scripture, *Here are two Swords*. If any other Church will not be prevailed upon to put up her temporal Sword into the Scabbard, it is time for the State to put it up for her. The Time will come when Kings shall hate the Whore, and whatsoever appertains to her, wherever it is found, be scattered away. Truth will prevail, Truth is the Daughter of Time, and though the Mother is long in Travail, she certainly brings forth at last.

With relation to the *Book* or *Form of Common Prayer*; [by the way a kind of untouchable Plant.] It may be allowed there are several good Things in this Composition; nor shall I criticize upon such Parts of it, which some esteem otherwise. Yet there is one Objection to it; it is a wonderful  
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Thing that Minister and People should every Day in the Year, and for several Years current, feel just the *same Wants*, and have just the *same Mercies* to be thankful for. Many Persons, I do not say all, scarcely consider what they assent and say *Amen* to. The Affair is a Form indeed with such. It is a kind of Task, they are glad when it is over. But one can by no means affirm its Acceptance with the Supreme Being. It is too much like the *Opus Operatum* amongst the *Roman Catholics*, where the People depend upon the Work done, no matter how, and perhaps bring the Deity into Debt to them, for their miserable Performances.

In Places where Divine Service is read, and the Minister afterwards delivers a Composition, which he holds before him, in Writing, though possibly he may be a Man of Learning, a foreign Critic would be apt to say, I see nothing requisite here, more than to *write* and *read*. Here is Suspicion given either of the Minister's Incapa-

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city or Indolence. Such Performances do not strike the Mind; there is too much the Appearance of Form; a Flatness sits upon the Audience, and (in some Places) 'tis with Difficulty they refrain from a sound Sleep.

Let us stand up and take a View of the Manner of *foreign* Protestant Churches. But perhaps some will object aforehand to this kind of Argument, by imminding me that we are wiser in *England*, than all Foreigners whatsoever. Be it so; the wiser the better; but let us not be such Monopolizers, as not to allow Foreigners some small Share. In the first Place, the Custom of reading Sermons is unknown abroad; neither is there a Book of Common-Prayer (if I am not misinformed) in any Protestant State in *Europe*. They set forth in most Countries a *Directory*, a Directory in general concerning the Heads of Prayer and Doctrine, but confine not. They expect a *Gift* and *Ability* in a Minister,  
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(if he has not a Gift, how is he a Minister?) apt to manifest itself by something fresh and affecting, every Time an Audience meets. Such is the Institution and Custom in SWISSERLAND, GERMANY, HOLLAND, DENMARK and SWEDEN. This upholds religious Liberty, renders Ministers circumspect and laborious in their Office, and preserves a national State from all ecclesiastical Incroachment. With the above Countries the Scriptures are the Establishment; they have no other.

In *Great Britain* we have another; a farther Establishment, made *conclusive* and *determinate*, for Ceremonies, Opinions and Prayer, even to a tittle, by Law. If the Arguments in the foregoing Essay are just, such an Establishment is not so thoroughly Protestant as might be wished; especially unless alleviated by remedial Laws. It supercedes the Scriptures in the Minds of the Generality, and from an Auxiliary becomes the Principal; the Virtue and Re-



Religion it produces, turn out accordingly vain, shallow and uncertain, and either Superstition or Profaneness will always be apt to overflow a People, who are in such a Situation. When Mankind have tried all the Schemes in their Power, they will find the Scriptures the only proper Authority for, and Source of, Religion. There is no compelling Men to be virtuous, or setting them a Form to be religious by ; all *real* Religion must be *free*.

I would ask a Person, who is uncommonly zealous for the *Establishment*, since you resolve to have it, how do you justify your not observing it in every Point? One Part bears the same Authority (if any) with another. Hast thou appealed unto this *Cæsar*? Unto *Cæsar* shalt thou go. Who is there, who hath observed precisely the Rules and Orders which precede the Common-Prayer ; perhaps who is there that hath read them? Who is there who keeps the forty Days of *Lent*, abstaining from

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Flesh also every *Friday* (for so it is ordered) throughout the Year? Should it be alledged, that an Observation of these Articles is not now expected; or perhaps never was practicable to the mechanic and laborious Part of a Nation; this only tends to confirm my Argument; namely, shews the *Vanity* of such Appointments. Indeed, supposing Men ever so capable of observing these Externals, still it will be a Truth, that a single moral and virtuous Action, one Act of Justice or Charity in Life, is worth ten thousand of them.

Our Lord hath but *one Church* throughout the Earth. Herein, I think, the *Romanists* maintain a Truth. It is also a Catholic Church; it never stands in Externals, or in a Name, or Party. Christians collectively, of whatever Name or Party, who believe in the Son of God, and shew forth Morality in Life, are Members of this Church. Go where they will, or howsoever they may be distinguished, they are all of

one Church, and, in effect, of one Communion. Agreeably to this Protestant Maxim, when *Grotius* was asked on his Death-bed, what Communion he should die in, that learned Person thought it sufficient to answer, that he should die in the Church of *Christ*.

Mankind are under an Error, who think that *Antichrist* hath no Place but at *Rome*. He is capitally there, but not universally. All who confine Truth to their own Church, or restrain Liberty to their own Party, cherish in their Minds the same Spirit, though they may not discern it. *Antichrist* is born in every Country, and in every Man, and nothing but a thorough Degree of right Reason casts it out. It is the Care of States, and the Honour of wise States, to guard against the Evil, and to preserve their Communities from it as far as they can; and every honest Man, who loves Justice

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and Mercy, sets his Face against it, to the uttermost of his Ability.

Of all arbitrary Power the spiritual hath kept its Ground longest, and will strive hard to be the last that shall quit the Field. Sometimes, indeed, it may seem to disappear, and content itself without Exertion; and well it may, when its Hands are tied up. But in such a Case, who knows its Meditations? 'Tis yet an Enemy in Ambush, or like a Fire smothered under the Ashes, to revive by the first favourable Breath that shall blow upon it. Perhaps some may reason against the Precaution here urged, by taking Notice that the present Age is favoured with a Set of Ecclesiastics, especially amongst the *Prelates*, who are Persons of distinguished Temper and Moderation. Be it so. Then let us keep them so; the best of Men are Men still. There is no Certainty in human Resolutions; Power and Opportunity make surprising Alterations: And I take it to be a



Protestant Maxim, founded on Experience, never to trust either one Man, or any Set of Men, with a Grain of Power beyond what is necessary. For why? this would be tempting our Friends, doing them a Diskindness, and risking a Nation's Happiness without a Cause. Again, do Men live for ever? Who can foretel the Disposition of the next Age? I must observe, 'tis not a *natural Case* to see Ecclesiastics favourable to religious Liberty, the Posture we now possess, or rather some imagine we possess, is not to be expected as a Constancy, is not to be depended upon. Should Time, or Temptation, produce a Difference, *Pre-  
tence* for Persecution will never be wanting; nor a *Colour* for the greatest Injustice. Spiritual Tyranny always commences and sets forward upon a plausible Foot. It begins with Admonitions, which are just; but by and by, under a Notion of wholesom Severities, it creeps to Body and Goods, every Degree of which Discipline is absolutely

lutely unwarrantable. Even an *Auto da Fé* in *Portugal*, how artfully it conducts itself. The first Face of that is specious enough, but the Features always grow darker, and more horrid, the farther it proceeds. Persecution may begin also upon a few, (for it wants no Policy) and those possibly singularly obnoxious to popular Prejudice; but we may be assured, it will reach every Soul of Man at last, who shall presume to be independent. Persecution, upon whatsoever Branch of Society it rages, or at whatsoever Distance from others, is a Danger to the Public, of such a kind, as when one sees *a Neighbour's House on fire*. In this case we lend an Hand to quench the Flame, and would gladly see it compleatly extinguished, lest it should reach our own.

Great Misery hath attended the World, through Persons standing up for their own Liberties, without an equal Care of others; and persecuting

in turn, in the *Spirit* of the Church of Rome, without claiming its Infallibility or Dominion. One meets with much of this Relapse and Oversight, in the History of *Henry* the Eighth, where the Reformation appears as yet in a rough Draught. The Setters forth of Edicts and Alterations in those Times, particularly *Henry* himself, seem constantly to have forgot what was the Evil they had removed, or the Authority they had demolished. It is not sufficient for those who succeed in Power to say, what we enact, what we enjoin, we do it not by a *Roman* Authority, it is contained in Scripture. Others commanded false and unscriptural Things; we nothing but the Truth: This Parade, I say, is all impertinent and frivolous, (who hath not said the same?) unless Mankind are permitted to judge whether it is Truth or not. An Article may be in Scripture, to the eye of the Magistrate, or Ecclesiastical Officer, and nobody besides be able to discern it. Still the Advocates insist,  
learned



learned Men see it there, every body sees it there, except the obstinate. Well; as a *Protestant*, I reply, I may be obstinate; but may not others be imaginary; and mistake, by the Force of Prejudice and Interest. You must permit me to see it for myself; it concerns my Soul. I must not, ought not to believe, or comply, without being first persuaded in my own Mind. 'Tis a necessary *Justice* to my Conscience, and *just Men* will concede to it. He who steps over, and forgets Justice, may alledge Scripture, Peace of Society, Authority of Government, or whatever besides he pleases; the Thing which inwardly moves, is none of these Pretensions, but a *dictating Spirit* and *Self*. Not but many great and excellent Things were brought about in the Reign I am speaking in Reference to yet the Positiveness and Rashness of several Proceedings, on the Part of King, Convocation, and Parliament too, cannot be denied. These were the rough Essays of Protestantism, (for nothing



nothing can be brought to its Perfection at once) rather to be corrected and improved upon, than despised by future Times. The milder Sentiments which appear in the succeeding Reign of *Edward* the Sixth, like a Calm after a Storm, makes some Amends for all this Hurry and Disorder. The Sentiments of *Edward's* Reign, on the Subject of Religion, are, for the Generality, just and mild. So are those, generally, which run through the Reign of Queen *Elizabeth*. A Princess, who stood the Shock of *Rome*, *Spain* and *France*, in Defence of Protestant Liberty, both at home and abroad; and has left an Age distinguished in our Annals, for Courage, Probity, Wisdom, and consummate Policy. Under several Princes, who succeeded *Elizabeth*, the Cause of Liberty was, by means of false Maxims in their Government, in some measure *impaired* and *oppressed*. Many Incroachments were made upon it, and *more* attempted; and a Struggle carried on,

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various Success, between Liberty and Church arbitrary Power, as well as other arbitrary Power, almost till we touch the Time of *George* the First. By the Accession of that Prince to the Throne, high-flying Principles received a Check, and Liberty revived. It was preserved at a critical Season, and by the King's steady and honourable Administration, receiving fresh Vigour, and growing in the Esteem of all rational Persons, has happily flourished to the present Day. Even the Enemies of the HOUSE OF *HANOVER* (if it has any) will acknowledge, that its Princes have maintained this Article in an unexceptionable manner. They have made it a Point of Honour; and, we doubt not, will continue a Maxim at all Events, of such Dignity in itself, and true Lustre to the Crown.

If there are any Relics of Danger, or Precarioufness attending Liberty, we have a Prospect of their being removed

moved, and vanishing wholly away. Bigotry, has evidently lost Ground; and Liberty is more understood and esteemed daily. Possibly Providence has reserved for the HOUSE of *HANOVER*, the Honour of bringing this great Article to its Perfection. Should any one suggest, that the Benefit I am speaking of is connected with so great an Evil, that I might have spared its Commendation; should, I mean, be imputed to Liberty, that *Vice* and mischievous *Licentiousness* which have lately prevailed amongst us; I answer, Licentiousness is no Part or Branch of Liberty, but ought always to be distinguished from it. All the Vice which has appeared has been owing to other Circumstances and Incidents, which my present Subject does not require me to meddle with. No ill Consequence ever did, or can flow from Liberty, properly considered in its *own Nature*.

In proportion as Men improve in their Ideas of Liberty, they grow more cool and moderate, in relation to many Articles, which before they laid great Stress upon. The Divine Right of this or that Form of Church-Government, whether by *Bishops, Priests and Deacons*, or by *Presbyters and Deacons*, or in some Form different from both; the Authority and sole Validity of this or the other ministerial Order; their Right to exclude the rest, or at least Preference to them, in administering Things sacred: These, and several other Points of the like Nature, if not wholly cease, always *lose* Ground, as Knowledge and Experience *gain* Ground in the World. After much Fatigue, and fruitless Disputations, it will be found (if I mistake not) that the Gospel, or New Testament, holds forth *no* precise Model of Church-Government at all. Nothing of this kind was intended. It is not in the Nature of Things to fit with one Model all



Times, Persons and Places, nor agreeable to the free Genius of the Gospel. Had the Holy Ghost intended one precise Model, either for Government or ordaining of Ministers, he would not have left it under a Difficulty to be perceived or understood, or subject to doubtful Disputation. It would have been said, as in some Cases we find it, This shall be the Rule. A mere Example or Precedent in Scripture, though it may shew a Matter lawful, is no Argument of perpetual Obligation. Men are apt to be arbitrary in their dealing with Scripture: *Some* Things shall be Precedents with them for a Rule invariable, *others* not, as suits the Schemes previously conceived in their own Minds. Such consult the Word, with a View of bringing it to *their* Scheme, not their Scheme to *it*. Doubtless different Models may be lawful, equally lawful, for any thing the Scripture intimates to the contrary, provided the Liberty of Individuals be preserved inviolable, and the Reality of

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Religion is found to flourish under them.

So with respect to the Validity of this, or another ministerial Ordination, in proportion as Prejudices wear away, and Superstition, which is ever founded on Fear, abates, Protestants place less Importance in them, and, indeed, in the Persons and Professions of Men daily, and more in the inward Matter or Substance of Religion. They will honour, and ought to honour, all Ministers for their Works sake; but, if they are wise, not for their Ordination sake, be it Church, or be it Presbyterian, or any other. Persons may come in a ministerial Way, in their own Wisdom, and with so many Views, that a private Christian should learn to distinguish whether a Man comes, or whether he is sent.

Again, Reason and Equity will tell us, that a religious Ministry hath a Right to be supported, and a Maintenance

nance afforded such who attend in Divine Offices, suitable to their Character. In this Point, the Scripture, both Old and New Testament, is absolute and clear. No just Objection lies against a liberal Appointment for them, provided they are found Persons of Virtue, and are diligent in the Discharge of their Trust; but such who run before they are sent, or who, to aggrandize themselves, are of that Number who exhibit Sights in the Air, I know not of any Maintenance they are intitled to, except it be in some Place of hard Labour. It is also fit that Preferments should be equally divided, for the real Encouragement of Learning and Diligence; and perhaps that Contributions should, in a great measure, be voluntary, with respect to one kind of Ministers or another; otherwise there arises strong Temptation to *Indolence* and *Neglect*; Persons may expect something for nothing, and those happen to receive most who are least deserving.

It is observable, in Countries where an Establishment hath prevailed, and Places not of Profit only, but of Power, are connected with a Membership in the Church, it requires much Attention and Firmness to preserve *the Independency* of the Crown. In this Situation a King can scarcely avoid becoming the King of a Party, and the secular Arm is made an Arm indeed, for Ecclesiastics to wield at *their* Pleasure. In the Times when Popery was at the height, the World lay under great Inadvertency on this head. What Vassals, in effect, did the Princes and States of *the Empire*, and Emperor too, make themselves, to execute the Revenge of *Rome*, and gratify the Papal Ambition! Many held the Stirrup so long for his Holiness, that at last they lost their own Saddles. And who hath pitied them for it? In *England*, indeed, we have seen, especially of late Years, Princes of another Dignity, and another Discernment.

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The King of *Great-Britain* bears a peculiar Title, *Defender of the Faith*. How do we interpret this Title! Surely not that it signifies him Defender of the *Roman Catholic* Faith; but if it hath a just Meaning, it must be thus, Defender of the Faith of the Holy Scriptures. Nor can it solely mean him Defender of the Faith of the Church of *England*; that would be too narrow a Signification for so large a Title; but of all the Christian Churches committed to his Care, throughout his Dominions. 'Tis true, the *Roman* Pontif, when he made the first Complement of it to King *Henry*, might intend it in the Papal Sense; I deny not that; but then our Kings are not obliged to take it in that Sense; they are not obliged to wear it in a limited Sense; nor in any *short* of a *Protestant Comprehension*.

To support the Dignity of a free State; to rescue the Crown from Con-

finement to a Party ; and to strengthen, in general, the Protestant Interest ; possibly a Time may come, possibly, I say, but every thing in its Season, when our Legislature will think it meet, by one single Act, *to cancel, at once, all EXCLUSIVE Sanctions*, with a View to abolish every *Disqualification, Restriction, Pain, Penalty, Disadvantage in Law*, or Hardship of any kind, on *a religious Account*, which have lain upon the Nation. The Establishment would still subsist, except in the exclusive Parts ; that is, it would subsist so far as is *Protestant and rational*.

Till a Measure of this kind takes place, the Nation may have Intervals of Peace and Concord, through incidental Causes, such as the late Rebellion, but no solid Unanimity. Usurpation and Persecution may sleep, but will not be dead. *The Act of Toleration* the Friends of Liberty are thankful for ; it is a good Acquisition in its kind ;

kind ; but it cannot be said of it, that it comes up to the Point, or is adequate to the Evil. It gives some Ease, (as the Act expresses itself) not *total* Ease. If coercive Laws, in Matters of Religion, are fit to be suspended, they are fit, for the same Reason, to be wholly repealed ; otherwise the Evil still continues, and the Wound in the Body of the State is kept open. Whilst we have only temporary Mitigations, who knows how soon the State may suffer a *Relapse* ; every Day hath Danger.

By a general Declarative Act, as above, many injurious and embarrassing Sanctions, particularly *the Test-Act*, would fall in course. The Injury which *the Test-Act* does to Religion, through debasing a solemn Sacrament, and occasioning ('tis to be feared) much shameful Dissimulation, is acknowledged by every Man of Virtue, as the political Iniquity of it is by Men of Understanding. That Papists should

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be excluded from Places of Power or Trust, Reason will allow, and, in some Sense, demands, because they are not capable of proper Allegiance to the Government, as owning a foreign Jurisdiction ; but that the Edge of that exclusive Law should be turn'd against Protestant Dissenters, whose Attachment to the Government hath been long manifested, and experienc'd, no visible Reason can be assign'd. Reason does not justify a religious Test amongst Protestants, of any Kind, as being a continual Inconsistency with the Right of private Judgment. No Test can be necessary, besides *the Oath of Allegiance*, unless there cannot be an honest Man, or a loyal Man, amongst us, who is not a Member of the Church of *England*. Whatsoever is more than the Oath of Allegiance, proceeds from Party, or is a Relict of Popery. An Incumbrance upon Statesmen ; probably not originally a Dictate of their own Policy, but proceeding from, or at least taken Advantage of by, another Body;



Body ; who, under Colour of procuring the Security of the Crown, have meant chiefly to corroborate their own ; therefore cannot be expected to relinquish the *Test-Act*, or any other Acts of that Kind, without Reluctance. Whenever a Repeal is obtained, it must be a Lay-Wind that blows it. In the mean time it is certainly hard, that, with Respect to Friends or Enemies, our Princes cannot be permitted to judge for themselves. I should be glad to know when it may be suppos'd, that a Government is arrived at Years of Maturity. One would hope the Time is not far off.

A COMPREHENSIVE Scheme will have a great Tendency to abolish *three* National Evils ; *Party-Animosity*, *Bigotry*, and *Superstition*.

1. *Party-Animosity*. It is well known that Mischiefs to the State have been produc'd by the Strife of Parties. Where civil Discord has slain its Thousands, religious

religious Discord and false Zeal have slain their Ten Thousands. The Whole of this Evil, whether in *Britain*, or in foreign Countries, hath always proceeded from want of Attention to this one Principle, the Right of private Judgment. In all Parts of the World it arises from the same Spring ; most Ecclesiasticks ( for I never mean all ) setting themselves to oppose, and to discourage private Judgment, to the utmost of their Power. Liberty is no Friend to them. They cannot so conveniently live under it. If one names it, 'tis like Heresy ; they are presently *in Perils amongst false Brethren*. The Church is in Danger. The Populace takes the Alarm, it conceives Indignation, it rages, no matter how ignorantly ; and it is well if the Government itself escapes the Combustion. Such Incidents *have* been, and are always possible *to be again*, till the Evil is cur'd *radically*. The Notion of a rightful Church, with the Invalidity and Error of other Persuasions, floats so agreeably

ably upon the Surface of vulgar Minds, that, with several, 'tis more than half their Religion. Howsoever weak the Notion, or delusive the Hope formed upon it, it will have much Place with Mankind, till they cease standing upon human Authority, and all Protestants are brought upon one and the same Bottom. There is unconceivable Mischief in placing them, some upon higher Ground, and some upon lower. Unless their civil Merits be different, Protestant Reason would place them upon the same Ground, in the Eye of the Law, and with respect to the Privileges and Immunities belonging in general to his Majesty's Subjects. As to how they may stand in the Eye of Ecclesiastical Persons, being no Point which the State is obliged to be concern'd with. To prevent Mistakes, I would take notice, that should *Protestant Dissenters* attempt an Establishment, or aim at a Pre-eminence *on their Part*, the Arguments in this Dissertation (if it contains

tains any) would be equally strong against *them*.

The Civil Magistrate should steer, as near as he can, an equitable Course. And though he forces none to his own Persuasion, he has a Right to recommend such a Persuasion, by his own Example. He has also a Right to a general Obedience, from Persons of all Persuasions, from every Quarter. And to see that the Common Wealth takes no Damage. Religion, or Conscience, acquits no Man from the Obligations of Subjection to Government. Should any be found in his Carriage to discover Undutifulness or Disloyalty, such a One is justly controulable by the secular Arm, be his Persuasion what it may. It is always fit to punish Offenders, though never on Account of Party.

2. *Bigotry*, an Evil not peculiar to *Britain*, but the Produce of every Soil. This lazy Foible consists in an Attachment to Persons instead of Things, and



and Customs instead of Reason. Sometimes even to a Spot of Ground, or a Building, *what manner of Stones*, and *what Buildings are here!* To believe as the Church believes, (what kind of Belief it generally proves, hath been observed before) saves human Nature so much Labour and Application, is so compendious a Way, that the lower Ranks of Men chuse much to tread in it. Having no Learning themselves, they are apt to over-value that splendid Gift, and make an *Idol* of it in others; they are ready to conclude, that the Minister is after a sort infallible, and that he seldom errs in the Pulpit, howsoever he may err out of it. As infidel a World as some represent it, there is abundantly more Credulity in it than many apprehend; and a Legislature may, without the least Disrespect to the Clergy, judge it convenient that the People under their Care be kept as clear of Prepossession and Bigotry as lies in their Power.

It is observable, that *Pomp* and *Shew* in Religion, and even *ministerial Habits*, are apt to put somewhat in the Place of Religion which is not such, and beguile Mankind of their Affections. They are Circumstances which might be suitable to a worldly Occasion, and might forward a temporal View ; but one cannot say the Gospel affords them any Foundation. The Gospel is certainly a Stranger both to Force and Art. Whatsoever is forcible or artful, generally tends to Abuse. Christianity makes the best Way by its Simplicity ; and the Ministers of it their just and commendable Way by their Merit and Behaviour.

3. *Superstition* is another Evil which Mankind may, in some measure, be enabled to avoid. Through Superstition many embrace the *Externals* and *Trappings* of Religion, instead of the *Substance*. When this shallow Infirmary will be wholly chased out of the World,

World, I cannot affirm, but surely there is no Necessity to furnish it with all manner of Accommodations for its Use. The Custom of numerous Ceremonies may be just in States where Ignorance is the Mother of Devotion, but are out of Character in those, where Knowledge should be supposed to have that Office, and who profess the Purity of the Gospel. However, if some cannot content themselves without Amusements of this sort, let such possess them, if they please, to the uttermost, but not necessitate others to have the same Taste. I am not very solicitous what Variety of Gestures another uses in his Worship, or what Conges he makes to a particular Quarter, so he does not compel me to follow his Example. Be Persons ever so attached to an Establishment, or Admirers of Ceremonies, as esteeming them helpful, they cannot condemn a Worship where there are none, unless they will say, that Religion stands in external Things. We read of worshipping *in Spirit and in Truth.*

*Truth.* I apprehend that Passage to have a Meaning. The least of its Meaning must be, that in worshipping, *Spirit* and *Truth* are the chief Thing. Where these exist, they make a true Worship, and a right Church, whether its Materials be of Stone or Brick, whether with Ornaments or without; the Supreme Being not respecting such Articles, whatsoever Men may do. If many chuse a Place of Worship built due East and West, all Quarters are theirs, let them enjoy that Position. Let them possess all their Customs; for I am not for compelling Men, even to be free. But others ought to be reckoned Christians also, and their Churches valid Churches, though they are not erected by the Compass, though Praying amongst them is not accompanied with a Surplice, and their Sermons are delivered without a Gown. They do not happen to esteem them of Importance; perhaps look upon them as Tokens of the Absence of something better.

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Should there be Persons found, who are disposed to preach even in the Fields, and have their Meetings in Places scarce sheltered from Wind and Weather, yet with due Affection to the Government, I see no just Cause of disturbing them; they have a Right to it, unless Truth be local, and Religion cannot exist but on consecrated Ground. He that can hear of Variety in Opinions, or bear any Sentiments different from his own, without Anger, such a one is a true Protestant; and though this be not the Whole of Christianity, it must be allowed a great Step towards it. Persons come to be Christians through being Protestants first. Few arrive at the Knowledge of Truth, till they are delivered from *Prejudice, Customs, Systems*, and, in some Sense, from *Men*. Not Divinity only, but *Philosophy, Learning, and all Knowledge* whatsoever, (of a valuable Nature) depends upon Liberty in the Mind,

Mind, and flows from a free Enquiry.

To sum up the Subject. Freedom is the Foundation of every valuable Attainment, and in an especial Manner with regard to Religion. Not Persons, nor Parties, nor Ceremonies, nor Modes, nor Places, nor any thing merely outward, but what is truly moral, open and generous, what honours the Deity, and profits Mankind, are the Objects wise Men call and esteem Religion; and to these their Attention is fixed, nothing besides being worth contending for.

Till the Mind is delivered from Superstition, and exchanges Vassalage for a sober Liberty, daring to think for itself, it is deceived, and, in effect, knows nothing. How far this curtails the Knowledge of the World, I have neither Inclination nor Leisure, at present, to enquire. The Man who dares

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not think for himself, is as much a Coward as he who fears to fight an Enemy. Through neglecting to put in practice their religious Liberty, many, too many, enjoy the Privileges of a free Government in vain; and after several Years Profession of *Protestantism*, are (howsoever unintentionally) *Papists* still. On the other hand, such are happy, and act consistently with themselves, who both assert their Rights, and make *use* of them.

By some grand COMPREHENSIVE Act of the kind above-mentioned, and the Culture of a Spirit *just* to human Society, the Article of Liberty in this Kingdom would be brought to Perfection; and Reformation from Popery date, as from a new *Æra*, its being rendered compleat. Party and Animosity would feel the Blow, and be extinguished together; Bigotry would wear away, and Superstition grow ashamed

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shamed to shew its Head; Religion  
would become rational, Society easy,  
the whole *British* State strong, peace-  
ful, invincible.

*F I N I S.*



*E R R A T U M.*

Page 24, Line 6, for *be our Statesmen too*, read *to our Statesmen*,



